

CLAIMS

1. Data-handling means that provide a facility for bidding and a limit condition concerning the number of bids that can be made by an identified subscriber.
2. Data-handling means adapted to run a bidding facility, characterised in that the data-handling means are adapted to run a subscription and bidding facility for at least one set of subscribers to the facility, and comprise means to limit the number of successful bids that can be made by an identified subscriber in the set.
3. Means as claimed in claim 2, comprising means to limit the number of successful bids that can be made by an identified subscriber in the set to two.
4. Means as claimed in claim 2, comprising means to limit the number of successful bids that can be made by an identified subscriber in the set to one.
5. Means as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 4, comprising means to specify a number for the set and to check in respect of a said subscriber that guarantees have been made of subscribing for that number of subscription occasions.
6. Means as claimed in claim 5, comprising means to carry out the check before allowing the subscriber to make a bid.
7. Means as claimed in claim 5, comprising means to carry out the check before allowing the subscriber to start subscribing.
8. Means as claimed in any one of claims 5 to 7, comprising means to ensure for a said subscriber that said number is the maximum number of subscription occasions and bidding occasions and check that subscription is made in respect of all of such number of subscription occasions.
9. Means as claimed in any one of claims 5 to 8, comprising means to ensure that said number is the only number (apart from default) of subscribers allowed in the set at any one time and the subscribing and bidding facility for the set cannot start to run until that number of intending subscribers has been reached.
10. Means as claimed in claim 9, comprising means to ensure that said facility for said set terminates upon completion of said number of subscribing and bidding occasions.
11. Means as claimed in any one of claims 5 to 8, comprising means to ensure that said number is the maximum number of subscribers allowed in the set at any one time.
12. Means as claimed in claim 11, comprising means to specify a starting number for a set and ensure that the set has this number of intending subscribers before the subscription and bidding facility can run for the set.
13. Means as claimed in claim 11 or 12, comprising means to allow the subscription and bidding facility to continue to run for more than said maximum number of subscription and bidding occasions.
14. Data-handling means adapted to run a bidding facility, characterised in that the data-handling means are adapted to run a subscription and bidding facility for at least one set of subscribers to the facility, and comprise:
 - means to facilitate a string of successive bidding occasions and ensure that on each of them only one successful bid is allowed;
 - means to ensure that a subscription occasion precedes each bidding occasion;

- means to specify a number characteristic for the set, to specify this as the number of successive bidding occasions constituting a chain of such occasions within said string, to associate an identified subscriber with a said chain, to check that in respect of such subscriber guarantees have been made of subscribing for that chain, and to ensure that the subscriber's subscription expires at the end of said chain;
- 5 and means to limit the number of successful bids that can be made within that chain by that identified subscriber.
15. Means as claimed in claim 14, comprising means to ensure that an identified subscriber can participate in the facility for only one said chain in a said string.
16. Means as claimed in claim 14, comprising means to ensure that an identified subscriber can participate in the facility for not more than two of said chains in a said string at a time.
- 10 17. Means as claimed in claim 14, comprising means to ensure that an identified subscriber can participate in the facility for only one said chain at a time in a said string.
18. Means as claimed in claim 15 or 16, comprising means to ensure that a said string has only the length of one said chain.
19. Means as claimed in claim 16 or 17, comprising means to allow a said string to be longer than one said chain.
20. Data-handling means, adapted to provide an electronic site with: secure entry, a facility for bidding, and a limit condition
- 15 concerning the number bids that can be made by an identified subscriber.
21. Data-handling means, comprising means to provide an electronic site with
- (a) secure entry for subscribers to the site,
 - (b) a facility for bidding, and
 - (c) a facility to ensure that an identified subscriber who has made winning bids a predetermined number of times cannot
- 20 subsequently make a successful bid.
22. Data-handling means, comprising means to provide an electronic site with
- (a) secure entry for subscribers to the site,
 - (b) a facility for bidding, and
 - (c) a facility to ensure that a subsequent successful bid for an identified fungible object is not allowed for an identified
- 25 subscriber who has made a predetermined number of winning bids for that object.
23. Means as claimed in claim 21 or 22, comprising means to provide for said predetermined number to be two.
24. Means as claimed in claim 21 or 22, comprising means to provide for said predetermined number to be one.
25. Means as claimed in any one of claims 21 to 24, comprising means to provide an electronic site with a facility to check
- that a subscriber to the site has provided guarantees of making subscriptions in respect of a predetermined number of
- 30 subscription occasions.
26. Means as claimed in claim 25, comprising means to provide an electronic site with a facility to check that a subscriber to the site has provided guarantees of making subscriptions in respect of a predetermined number of subscription occasions before allowing the subscriber to bid.

27. Means as claimed in any one of claims 21 to 26, comprising means to provide said site with a plurality of subdivisions, each adapted to allow bidding for a separate identified fungible object.
28. Means as claimed in claim 27, comprising means adapted for a said fungible object to be a monetary fund.
29. Means as claimed in claim 27 or 28, comprising means to terminate a subdivision together with its fungible object.
- 5 30. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 29, comprising means to provide a said subdivision with secure entry, that is, to allow only those subscribers pre-authorised for that subdivision to access it.
31. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 30, comprising means to provide a facility to allow a subscriber access to only a predetermined limited number of subdivisions.
32. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 31, comprising guarantee-checking means adapted to check, before a 10 subscriber is allowed to bid, that he has creditworthiness or other guarantees for his continuing to subscribe on all subsequent bidding occasions of a predetermined number after he has won, and consequently give him pre-authorisation to bid.
33. Means as claimed in claim 32, in which the guarantee-checking means are adapted to effect such a check as mentioned in claim 32 so as to issue the pre-authorisation before the subscriber is first allowed access to a subdivision.
34. Means as claimed in claim 32, in which the guarantee-checking means are adapted to effect such a check as mentioned 15 in claim 32 so as to issue the pre-authorisation before the subscriber is allowed access to the site for the purpose of bidding.
35. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 34, comprising means to check that a winning subscriber is adequately guaranteed, and then to calculate any tax or other pre-arranged deduction, his winnings to be paid out to him, and the part or parts of his winning bid to be paid out to each subscriber.
36. Means as claimed in claim 35, comprising means to effect the payments mentioned in claim 35.
- 20 37. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 36, comprising means to ensure that a subdivision is not first opened for bidding until it has a specified number of subscribers, and it is then open for bidding only for those subscribers and only for the same specified number of bidding occasions.
38. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 36, comprising means adapted to ensure that the subdivision is not opened for receiving subscriptions until it has the specified number of subscribers.
- 25 39. Means as claimed in claim 38, comprising means to ensure that the subdivision terminates after a number of subscription and bidding occasions equal to the specified number of subscribers.
40. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 38, comprising means to specify the maximum number of bidding occasions for each subscriber to the subdivision and to ensure that the subdivision is allowed to continue for more than this number of bidding occasions.
- 30 41. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 40, comprising means to ensure that a subdivision is not first opened for bidding until it has a predetermined minimum number of subscribers, and it is then open for bidding only for a specified maximum number of subscribers, and only for the same number of successive bidding occasions for each subscriber regardless of when he starts to subscribe to the subdivision.
42. Means as claimed in any one of claims 21 to 40, comprising means to ensure that once a subscriber has completed 35 subscribing for the specified number of successive bidding occasions, his subscription expires.

43. Means as claimed in claim 42, comprising means to allow a subscriber, after his subscription expires, to open another subscription for the same fungible object.
44. Means as claimed in claim 43, comprising means to allow a subscriber to have a maximum of two subscriptions running at the same time for the same fungible object, not necessarily started at same time.
- 5 45. Means as claimed in any one of claims 21 to 44, comprising means adapted to enable a subscriber upon starting a subscription to choose whether to bid on his first bidding occasion.
46. Means as claimed in any one of claims 21 to 45, comprising means adapted to enable a subscriber upon starting a subscription to withdraw his subscription if he fails to win on his first bidding occasion.
- 10 47. Means as claimed in any one of claims 21 to 46, connected or adapted to be connected to a funds transfer machine, which term includes an automatic transfer machine (commonly known as ATM or a bank cash dispenser machine), for such machine to be used by a subscriber as a terminal for utilising the electronic site.
48. Means as claimed in any one of claims 21 to 47, connected or adapted to be connected to, or adapted to interrogate, a financial account of a subscriber held on data-handling means, to obtain from the latter in relation to such account a guarantee of making subscriptions in respect of a predetermined number of subscription occasions.
- 15 49. Means as claimed in claim 48, adapted to render a direct debit to said financial account in respect of a subscription occasion for the electronic site.
50. Means as claimed in claim 49, adapted, in conjunction with the data-handling means holding the financial account, to obtain a guaranteed payment from the account in respect of a subscription occasion.
51. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41, comprising display means adapted to provide a display of those 20 subdivisions for which a subscriber can be pre-authorised.
52. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51, comprising display means adapted to provide for an identified subscriber a display of those subdivisions for which he is pre-authorised.
53. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51 or 52, comprising display means adapted to provide for an identified subscriber pre-authorised for a subdivision a display of current bids for that subdivision.
- 25 54. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51 to 53, comprising display means adapted to provide for an identified subscriber pre-authorised for a subdivision a display of current and previous bids for that subdivision.
55. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51 to 54, comprising means to establish and/or register a credit limit for a said subdivision.
56. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51 to 55, comprising means to establish and/or register a credit limit 30 for a subscriber.
57. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51 to 56, comprising means to effect and/or control pre-authorisation for a subscriber for a said subdivision in dependence upon a credit limit for the subscriber and credit limits for that subdivision and for all other subdivisions for which the subscriber is pre-authorised.
58. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51 to 57, comprising means to store previous bids for a subdivision 35 and make these, or some of them, or selected ones of them, or selected kinds of them, available for access by a subscriber.

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59. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51 to 58, comprising means to pre-authorise a subscriber for a subdivision.
60. Means as claimed in any one of claims 27 to 41 or 51 to 59, comprising means to offer a subscriber a choice whether to subscribe or not upon a particular access.
- 5 61. Means as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 60, comprising monitor means adapted to provide information by printing, displaying, storage or otherwise in a restricted access manner due to location, coded access or otherwise, so that suitably authorised communicatees, e.g. organisers of the facility, can access the information but communicatees, e.g. subscribers, unauthorised for this purpose can not.
- 10 62. Means as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 61, comprising channels for individual said subscribers to participate in said bidding facility.
63. Means as claimed in claim 62, which comprise a network of terminals connected to, or able to be connected to, said channels.
64. Means as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 63, which are connected to, or switchable to be connected to, a source of funds for a said subscriber.
- 15 65. Means as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 64, which are connected to, or switchable to be connected to, means to apply for a transfer of funds from a said subscriber by direct debit.
66. Data-handling means substantially according to any example hereinbefore described.
67. Data-handling means substantially according to any example hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.
- 20 68. Any part of data-handling means as claimed in any one of claims of 1 to 67, which part is within the jurisdiction of the courts.
69. Means for programming data-handling means, which programming means are adapted to programme the data-handling means to be data-handling means as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 67.
70. Software adapted to provide data-handling means with the features of any one of claims 1 to 67.
- 25 71. A method of setting up or operating data-handling means to process information, or a method of processing information, in which method there is provided a facility for bidding and a limit condition concerning the number of bids that can be made by an identified subscriber.
72. A method of setting up or operating data-handling means to process information, or a method of processing information, in which method there is provided a facility for bidding, a limit condition concerning the number of bids that can be made by 30 an identified subscriber, and a check of guarantees as to funds transfer from the subscriber before the subscriber is allowed to make a bid.
73. A business system, which comprises data-handling means as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 67, adapted to receive investment funds from a said subscriber and to pay out loan funds to a said subscriber.
74. A game, which comprises data-handling means as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 67, and rules (which may be built 35 into the data-handling means) for players to play the game as said subscribers.

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75. A game which comprises use of data-handling means as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 67, according to rules (which may be built into the data-handling means) for players to play the game as said subscribers.

76. A method of conducting electronic commerce involving the exchange of investments and borrowings amongst a plurality of network registrants, the method comprising:

5 accepting from a plurality of said network registrants offers of investment;

auctioning groups of one or more of the investment offers among the network registrants;

receiving from at least one of said network registrants a bid for a borrowing of a said group;

ensuring that not more than a predetermined number of bids is successful from said one registrant.

77. A machine-implementable method of auctioning in which bids are received but a bidder is not allowed to have more than 10 a predetermined number of successful bids.

78. A method for digitally processing bids, which method ensures that a bidder does not have more than a predetermined number of successful bids.

79. A system for digitally processing bids, which system ensures that a bidder does not have more than a predetermined number of successful bids.

.15 80. Data-handling means, comprising:

means to note the identification of a subscriber inputting a value;

means to limit the number of such values input by such a subscriber;

and means to compare different such values and choose one of them according to a rule, in the manner of an auction.